

Grant Highlight: Whiting Community Center (Whiting, Lake County, Indiana)



The Whiting Community Center was built by the Rockefeller family and Standard Oil Company as a memorial for those who fought in WWI and to provide a recreation, entertainment, and social activity venue for Whiting, home of the oil company's largest refinery. It opened in 1923 to a crowd of 5,000 people. Located in the heart of the city, the facility is more than 70,000 square feet and includes two gymnasiums, an indoor track, a 12-lane bowling center, an indoor swimming pool, a billiards room, a 700-seat auditorium, a ballroom, two banquet halls, and a variety of fitness areas. The building's architecture reflects an Italian influence with arched windows and doors, rounded clay tiled roof, and inlaid paneling. Until the 1970s, the Standard Oil Company (later Amoco) used the auditorium for the annual stockholder's meeting. Since 1973, the City of Whiting has owned and operated the facility for the benefit of the local community.



Like many historic buildings, the Community Center has suffered from deferred or inappropriate maintenance and has various preservation and rehabilitation needs. In 2003, the City commissioned a building evaluation and needs assessment which identified more than \$2.4 million of needed repair and renovation. The City, committed to the Center and its importance to the community, began undertaking projects with the assistance of public and private donations from many partners to pursue many of these projects.

As a municipally owned building listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the Whiting Community Center is eligible to apply for Historic Preservation Fund matching grants from the DHPA. They submitted their first application in 2007 to replace the flat roof which covers approximately three-fourths of the building. A second successful grant in 2008 assisted with masonry rehabilitation on the west elevation of the building. The third project funded by HPF in 2009 resulted in an upgrade of the electrical system and panels throughout the building. The system was outdated, and several panels were located in areas that were unsecured and publicly accessible. A 2010 HPF grant project for the building resulted in repairs to water-damaged interior plaster in the main vestibule, both side entrance vestibules, the bowling alley, the billiards room, the racquetball court, the social room, the women's gym, the main gym at track level, storage areas, and the memorial room. In addition, the non-historic doors at the main entrance, two side entrances, and auditorium main and side entrances were all replaced. Finally, in 2012, the most recent project assisted with more masonry rehabilitation on the Center's 80 foot chimney which was deteriorated and in danger of partial collapse. In all, the HPF program has assisted with \$215,728 federal dollars and has been matched locally by the City with \$402,963 for a total investment of \$618,691 to help preserve and rehabilitate the Whiting Community Center.



The Center continues to provide numerous activities and services including preschool and after school programs, sporting leagues, adult and senior health and wellness, spaces for community gatherings, and events and performances to promote arts and humanities, as well as the variety of fitness opportunities. The rehabilitation, preservation, and continued maintenance of the facility is so important, not only for the significance of the history and architecture of the building, but more so for its use and availability to the surrounding community.



